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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: AMB. WISNER REAFFIRMS U.S. RESOLVE ON FINAL STATUS, REACHES OUT TO KOSOVO SERBS

Classified By: COM TINA KAI DANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In Kosovo October 24-26, U.S. Special Envoy Ambassador Frank Wisner delivered a three-part message to the top political leadership: maintain unity through and beyond final status; let the Kosovar people know now what lies ahead; and make certain the machinery of government is in place to accept the transfer of responsibility from UNMIK and implement the Ahtisaari settlement. Wisner told his interlocutors not to obsess about the timing of final status, including speculation about a possible delay caused by Serbian elections, but to focus on the governing capabilities of post-status Kosovo. This message resonated, even with opposition leader Hashim Thaci, who promised Wisner that he would continue to remain a part of the Unity Team. Wisner urged key mayors and Kosovo Assembly members to sell the benefits of decentralization to their constituencies and to engage responsibly in preparations for the post-UNMIK transition. They agreed, although the mayor of Gjilan claimed that "ethnic-based" decentralization would hurt integration of Serbs in his municipality. Wisner's Albanian interlocutors were all encouraged by his strong reiteration of U.S. support for the status process, and all expressed their faith and trust in the United States.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY (cont'd): At a dinner, SRSG Ruecker and COMKFOR LTG Kather listed a final status delay as their number one security concern, although Kather assured Wisner that KFOR could deal with security contingencies arising from this, including in the north. Both saw no indications of serious violence for the October 28-29 referendum in Kosovo on the new Serbian constitution. Wisner breakfasted with Slobodan Petrovic, moderate leader of a small Kosovo Serb party, who said that most Serbs in the southern enclaves would not leave Kosovo, but would take a wait and see attitude after status. In Klina, accompanied by COM and moderate Serb Orthodox leaders Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava, Wisner visited Kosovo Serb returnees who were victims of a recent grenade attack, and urged the mayor to bring the perpetrators to justice. Amb. Wisner's visit demonstrated to the Kosovo Albanian leadership our determination to resolve final status, and to Kosovo Serb leaders our strong support for a continued Serb presence in Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

Message to Kosovar Leadership: Maintain Unity, Educate Public, Get Ready to Govern

¶13. (C) USG Special Envoy for Kosovo Ambassador Frank Wisner, in Kosovo October 24-26, met separately with President Sejdiu, PM Ceku, the Unity Team, Assembly leaders, opposition leader Thaci, key mayors, newspaper editors, and intellectuals to deliver a three-part message: maintain unity through and beyond final status; act now to explain the provisions of the settlement to the Kosovar public; and ready the machinery of government to take over administration from UNMIK and implement the provisions of the settlement. President Sejdiu assured Wisner that unity would be maintained and that he had begun to engage with the citizenry, but agreed that more could be done. PM Ceku noted that he had created a transition team within his office to liaise with UNMIK and the planning team of the International Civilian Office in preparation for the post-status period. Assembly President Berisha detailed the recent passing of Standards-related legislation on religion, language and cultural heritage, and said the Assembly would be ready to take on legislation implementing a final status settlement. All expressed their thanks to and trust in the U.S. in helping to conclude the status process as rapidly as possible.

¶14. (C) Opposition PDK leader Thaci, joined by his three vice presidents, promised Wisner that his party would remain committed to the Unity Team and continue to "invest in the state-forming unity of politics." That said, he accused the government of "misusing" this cooperation by dismissing opposition-oriented public servants on political grounds and trying to control the public media. Thaci also asserted the need for there to be a two-thirds Assembly majority on

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passage of a new constitution, and for consensus among parties on the timing of elections and the electoral system. Wisner responded that Special Envoy Ahtisaari's proposals on these matters would take a number of these concerns into account. While Wisner expressed sympathy for the difficulty of putting normal opposition concerns on hold, he made clear that the current period was too critical for there to be politics as usual in Kosovo. Wisner encouraged Thaci to be patient until final status had been resolved and Kosovar institutions were able to stand on their own.

¶15. (C) Wisner told six key mayors, including those of the two largest cities of Pristina and Prizren, that they play a crucial role in getting the word out on the status settlement. He urged them not to wait until the final document was presented, but to sell the benefits of decentralization to their constituencies. Wisner said the creation of Serb municipalities, where they are viable, would only make Kosovo stronger. The mayors responded positively to this message, although the mayor of Gjilan argued that ethnic-based decentralization would damage the multi-ethnic character of his municipality.

Look to Your Own Responsibilities

¶16. (C) Most interlocutors and the press with whom Wisner met remained preoccupied with a possible final status delay and the details of the settlement. Thaci specifically asked if Wisner could state publicly that the U.S. remains committed to ending the status process in 2006, while ORA party chairman Veton Surroi wanted the U.S. openly to support an "unambiguous" resolution of final status. Newspaper editors angled for Wisner to use the word "independence," and intellectuals asked about Russia's position, the notion of "conditional" independence, and the mechanics of recognition.

¶17. (C) Wisner responded by underscoring that the U.S. and the Contact Group will continue their efforts to resolve status by the end of the year, as articulated in the CG

Ministerial statement of September 20. He urged Kosovar political and media leaders not to obsess over the status timeline, including speculation about a delay due to Serbian elections, or to get bogged down in settlement details. All needed to look at the larger picture and ensure that they were prepared to assume the responsibilities that would inevitably come with the final status settlement, whatever its outcome.

Status Delay Number One Security Concern for Key Internationals

¶8. (C) SRSG Ruecker and COMKFOR LTG Kather, at a dinner with Amb. Wisner, noted that their number one security concern was a final status delay. But Kather, as he has with us before, said that KFOR was well positioned to deal with contingencies. Asked what KFOR would do if the bridgewatchers blocked the main Mitrovica bridge, Kather responded that they would have it open "in ten minutes," since this was a freedom of movement issue. Kather added that KFOR had a more active presence in the north now and that he was more concerned with security for the southern Serb enclaves, particularly around Gjilan, than the north. He also mentioned security gaps, saying there was little confidence in the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) to secure borders and maintain law and order, especially given the smaller post-UNMIK international civpol presence now envisioned. Both Ruecker and Kather said there were no indications of any serious problems with the holding of the October 28-29 referendum on a new Serbian constitution in the 265 polling station throughout Kosovo.

Support For Kosovo's Serbs

¶9. (C) Wisner found PM Ceku focused on how to create conditions to keep Serbs in Kosovo. Ceku claimed that his goal was to separate Kosovo Serbs from Belgrade, similar to

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the process Croatian Serbs had gone through, so that they could speak for themselves and create their own identity. To do this, Ceku, who said he did not want his role to be made public, had engaged a Croatian Serb adviser to organize a congress in December of Kosovo's Serbs, mainly those in the south, but perhaps with participation of those in the north as well. This "congress," he said, would elect its own representatives and have as its main task defining the conditions that would help maintain the Serb presence in Kosovo.

¶10. (C) As part of his outreach to Kosovar Serbs, Wisner assured Slobodan Petrovic, head of the small, Kosovo-based Serb Autonomous Liberal Party, of strong U.S. support for the Kosovo Serb community. Petrovic noted that a good number of Kosovo Serbs are aware the likeliest outcome of the status process is independence, and that they give great weight to U.S. assurances that Serb interests will be protected in the settlement.

¶11. (C) Amb. and Mrs. Wisner, accompanied by COM and moderate Serbian Orthodox Church leaders Bishop Teodosije and Father Sava, spent October 26 visiting the Kosovo-Albanian majority municipality of Kline/Klina in central Kosovo. Wisner met first with a family of elderly Kosovo Serb returnees who were injured in a September 19 grenade attack that severely damaged their apartment in Klina town. Wisner applauded their courage for returning to their home, which the Kosovo government's Ministry for Returns and Communities had repaired and re-furnished. During a meeting with Klina municipal officials, Wisner praised them for their work in facilitating Serb returns to the municipality, but strongly urged the mayor to bring the perpetrators of recent attacks to justice. The party then visited a Serb-owned shop in the ethnically mixed village of Vidanje, where Serb returnees described the difficult economic conditions faced by all residents, regardless of ethnicity. Amb. Wisner wrapped up

his visit to Kosovo with an interview with the Kosovo Serb radio station Radio KiM, in which he stressed that the settlement provisions would make it possible for Serbs to remain in Kosovo, with detailed guarantees for the rights and authorities of their community.

¶12. (U) Amb. Wisner has cleared this message.

¶13. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW